



Morning Alert - Friday, June 15, 2018

The following information reflects the reporting of the cited news media and does not reflect the opinions of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Japan Media Highlights is intended for USG use only and should not be forwarded. Visit the website [here](#). For more information, contact TokyoMATT@state.gov.

HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with a report that a senior MOFA official met briefly with North Korean officials yesterday on the sidelines of an international conference held in Ulaanbaatar. Fuji TV and TV Asahi reported on an incident in which a Tokyo-bound bullet train hit a person after leaving Hakata Station on Thursday. NTV led with a report on the murder of a nurse in Shizuoka, while TBS gave top play to a report on the scandal involving Nihon University's football team.

Top stories in national dailies included Prime Minister Abe's instructions to GOJ officials on arranging a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (Asahi), Abe's meeting with the families of the Japanese abductees (Sankei), a TEPCO plan to scrap another nuclear plant in Fukushima (Mainichi), a European Central Bank plan to end its quantitative easing by the end of this year (Nikkei), and the introduction of regulations on the private lodging business by 53 municipalities nationwide following the effectuation of a relevant law (Yomiuri).

INTERNATIONAL

Abe looks into possibility of meeting with Kim Jong Un

Asahi led with a report saying that it learned from a GOJ source on Thursday that Prime Minister Abe instructed relevant GOJ officials to look into the possibility of arranging a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as soon as possible to resolve the abduction issue, speculating that the premier will make a final decision on whether he will hold talks with the DPRK leader while carefully gauging Pyongyang's response. During a meeting on Thursday with the families of the Japanese abductees, Abe stated that by taking advantage of the U.S.-DPRK summit on Tuesday, he is determined to directly engage with North Korea in order to resolve the abduction issue. Speculating that Japan has shifted its approach from pressure to dialogue following the U.S.-DPRK summit, the

paper wrote that the Abe administration is in a difficult position because in the absence of prospects for the resolution of the abduction issue it will have a hard time moving forward with talks with North Korea.

Mainichi speculated that the GOJ is looking into the possibility of arranging a meeting with DPRK leader Kim Jong Un on the margins of international conferences, such as an annual economic forum to be held in Vladivostok in September or the UN General Assembly meeting to be held in New York in September. **Nikkei** published a similar speculative piece.

Onodera speaks with Secretary Mattis about possibility of troop withdrawal from ROK

Asahi, Mainichi, and Sankei wrote that Defense Minister Onodera spoke by phone with Secretary of Defense Mattis on Thursday. Asahi wrote that in response to President Trump's recent comment on the possibility of withdrawing U.S. troops from South Korea, the two defense chiefs confirmed that the U.S. Forces in Korea play an important role in the security of East Asia. Onodera told reporters afterward that Secretary Mattis told him that although the United States is not considering a troop drawdown in South Korea, it is conducting coordination on the possibility of suspending planned joint military drills with South Korea.

Asahi, Yomiuri, and Mainichi wrote that CNN reported on Wednesday that the Trump administration is expected to announce as early as Thursday the formal suspension of planning for the Ulchi Freedom Guardian joint military exercise with South Korea held annually in August. Asahi claimed that an unnamed Pentagon official told the paper that the Department of Defense will work closely with the White House to provide options that reflect the policy of President Trump.

In a related development, Yomiuri claimed that concern has been expressed in Japan and South Korea over the possibility of the United States considering the suspension of the planned joint military drills with South Korea. The paper wrote that the GOJ is concerned that the United States' possible suspension of the joint drills and reduction of its forces in South Korea in the future would have a negative impact on Japan's security by undermining the deterrence of the U.S. military. Nikkei ran a similar story.

Japanese, DPRK officials make contact at international conference in Mongolia

Yomiuri, Sankei, Mainichi, and Nikkei wrote that MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Deputy Director General Shimizu had a brief conversation with a North Korean foreign ministry official on Thursday on the sidelines of an international conference held in Ulaanbaatar. The Japanese official conveyed to the North Korean side Japan's position on the abduction issue, including the desire for the Japanese abductees to return home as soon as possible.

